

July 31, 1964

Yesterday we had our first contact with the law—and it was our fault, really. Rather, one of the two contacts was unnecessary, except for our driver's foolishness. We went to Tunica, 40 miles north, to register persons for Freedom Democrat Party. I registered 26—6 others did 90 among them, proving that I didn't do so badly. The county up there is 3 to 1 Negro, illiterate and scared. We were the first to show up in the county. Seven people I interviewed could not read or write, so I helped them to write the X, and did the writing for them. Upon leaving Tunica, about five miles out, we were stopped by Highway Patrol, —what is our name, address, driver's license, auto title, etc. A little "courteous" conversation such as, "We love them better than you—why don't you join the army like I did and fight for your country?" A Young man was driving my car. I was on the right front—7 in the car. We proceeded without charges. This young man tends to be a little reckless—he is the Voter leader, somewhat headstrong. We thought there was an officer back a ways, but this only made him nervous, so of course he was stopped and charged with driving 74 m.p.h. in a 65 mile zone. Some of us were disgusted with him, and if I ever let him drive my car again, which I don't intend to do, it will be with some understandings. Anyway, we drove on into town (2 miles to Clarksdale), county jail where the driver was booked and released on bail—\$25.00. Everything was courteous throughout. But my car was thoroughly searched, and each of us was shaken down TV style for fire arms. Imagine pulling out all my camping gear in the trunk, put there beside the road! I am provoked for the unnecessary identification of my Iowa car now. But it does give me a measure of authority with the kids. I am now one of them, in this incident at least.

But to say I know what is going on—I don't. There is an undercurrent of restlessness, and no one communicates with anyone. These are kids. They are headstrong, or they wouldn't be here—college age, who think they know it all without discussing among themselves. So Matt runs the voter registration and the others take orders grudgingly. Sandy is the boss of the Freedom Schools—4 or 3 of them, no one quite knows whether they are all running or not. David is in charge of the Community Center. They are all good kids—but very self-sufficient, all doing their job as best they can, as they see fit, brooking no counsel from the rest. Until this afternoon at one o'clock there is to be a staff meeting. It will be a good one. Of course we need one anyway, because Martin Luther King will be here Wednesday night, and Freedom Day is planned for August 11. There has to be some planning for each. The leader of the group, Lafayette, who is held in high regard by all, but ignored because he doesn't give leadership, is nowhere to be seen most of the time. I am sure he must be busy, and Yvonne is efficient as office boss, but no one communicates or correlates or integrates the project.

(Later). The day has progressed and a meeting of the staff was held. After staff meeting, Yvonne, our office gal, asked Loria to run the store so she and some others could go to Memphis over night for a well-deserved rest. I guess we are in.

But the staff meeting was interesting—heated at times—I took notes. (1) "Segregated" party the night before, attended by a local white moderate. Does the staff approve? Apparently not. (2) Should white females do voter canvassing in the Counties? Home and mother-hood seems to preclude. (3) Matt, the driver of my car, arrested, reported that his speeding was a tactical decision, that we were shadowed by other cars—didn't the group think COFO should pay the fine? Yes, but he was put on the ps for erratic driving. (4) The long hot summer has its effect on all our feelings—not enough staff meetings, not enough fun together. (5) Freedom Day, August 11, and 10 minister, not 40. Each staff volunteer is to write his own pastor and notify local preas of the Freedom Day. We will hold another staff meeting Monday, and some of us (me) are to visit with Ben Collins, the chief of police "and a bad one" about Freedom Day. There was more. It took lots of hours and frequent shouts and finger pointing, but it wasn't so bad.

Monday, August 10, I am to preach at the Jerusalem Baptist Church, my host's church—he is high up in his Daymen's movement, so this will be quite a thing for him—first time a white man has preached there. Sunday we will attempt to go the the Christian Church.

—Frazer A. Thomason